

Legislation Includes Sánchez Amendment to promote education for youth ex-offenders

Washington, D.C. -- Congresswoman Linda Sánchez (D-CA) today voted in support of the College Opportunity and Affordability Act of 2008, which included an amendment she introduced along with Congressman Alcee Hastings (D-FL) to authorize grants for community colleges to create partnerships with juvenile detention centers and residential facilities that would reduce recidivism rates among juvenile ex-offenders by providing education, vocational training, counseling, and related activities.

“Youth involved in gangs do not have to be condemned to a future involved in gangs,” said Congresswoman Linda Sánchez. “Believing that we can do more to turn around the lives of young people who have started down the wrong path, I am pleased to send legislation that leverages the power of community colleges to the President’s desk.”

By a vote of 380 to 49, the House approved the Higher Education Opportunity Act (H.R. 4137), which would reform and strengthen the nation’s higher education programs to ensure that they operate in the best interests of students and families. Among its provisions are new incentives for states to maintain their contributions to higher education, protections for prospective student loan borrowers, policies to make textbooks more affordable, and expanded funding for programs that help low-income and under represented students enroll and succeed in college. The legislation builds on the Democratic Congress’ efforts to make college more affordable and accessible for all qualified students.

The Hastings-Sánchez amendment authorizes a nationwide grant program through the Department of Education to promote holistic, community-centered partnerships aimed at reducing gang violence and recidivism rates among juvenile ex-offenders. Community colleges, partnering with appropriate local agencies and volunteers, would apply for the grants to educate juveniles detained in or released from secure facilities. In addition to offering students programs leading to a career certificate or an Associate’s degree, the community colleges would coordinate mentoring, counseling, and related services for youthful offenders to help them transition smoothly into the community as productive members of society and even cooperate with law enforcement in efforts to keep other youth from choosing to engage in gang activity.